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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000044

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [IS](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: NORWAY'S OPPOSITION UNITES ON PRO-ISRAEL RESOLUTION

REF: OSLO 32

Classified By: P/E Counselor Mike Hammer, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary
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1. (C) Norway's bitterly divided center-right parties came together on January 11 to table a Parliamentary proposition that would have given a clear "no" to any boycott of Israel. President of the Parliament Thorbjørn Jagland used the privilege of his position to stop the motion being brought to a vote in Parliament. Had he not done so, the government would have embarrassed itself further by voting against the anti-boycott motion. Political drama in Norway gets no higher than this, and the recriminations will carry on for a long time. The government's narrow escape, thanks to Jagland, will bring it little comfort. The government was jammed hard by the opposition and faced the prospect of either displaying its disarray on the floor of Parliament or voting down a motion that would support its stated "no Israel boycott" policy.

2. (C) The sight of Norway's center-right party leaders standing shoulder-to-shoulder is extremely rare; heretofore the smaller center-right parties have sought to maximize their distance from the populist right-wing Progress party. The fact that Halvorsen's blunders have united the fractious opposition creates yet more pain for Stoltenberg's government that wants to bury this whole sorry affair. We should welcome the fact that the opposition in Norway is drawing together, even if the circumstances could be more auspicious. End summary.

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Opposition rallies together against a boycott
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3. (U) On January 10, the leaders of Norway's four opposition parties announced that they would table a motion in Parliament calling upon the Government to state clearly that a boycott of Israel is not and will not be Norwegian policy. An unofficial Embassy translation of the opposition parties' motion is given below at paragraph 9. Journalists asked the four opposition leaders if they were against a boycott of Israel, and in turn they all answered "yes." The opposition leaders said that despite the clear statements by FM Stoere and PM Stoltenberg that an Israel boycott is not Norwegian government policy, the fact that Halvorsen's SV party still supports a boycott creates continuing uncertainty. By tabling a Parliamentary motion, the opposition parties hoped to remove permanently any doubt about Norwegian policy.

4. (U) The opposition's main points were: a boycott would not bring the Middle East closer to a peace agreement; it would hurt both Israel and the Palestinians economically; it would disturb international efforts between the parties; it would further destabilize a fragile internal political situation in both nations; it would be a hostile act against Israel, with which Norway has close and good relations; it would be irreconcilable with a continued peace role in the region for Norway; and it would damage Norway's interests internationally. The opposition parties asked that Parliament debate the motion as soon as possible (this week).

5. (U) Both Prime Minister Stoltenberg and Foreign Minister Stoere faced unrelenting questions in Parliament's weekly question time on January 11. Both stuck to the same line: that Norway's foreign policy towards the Middle East has not changed, and a boycott of Israel has never been Norwegian government policy. Stoltenberg made it clear that the government would not support the opposition's motion. The opposition, Stoltenberg said, were seeking to keep the debate alive for political purposes and were only creating more uncertainty and confusion by focusing on an issue that already had been managed and closed.

6. (U) The question of how to deal with opposition's motion came before the Parliament's combined Presidency (composed of six members, equally distributed between government and opposition parties) on the afternoon of January 11. With the members in the Presidency equally balanced on whether to

bring the motion to a vote in Parliament, Parliament President (former Labor party PM and FM, and long time foreign policy guru) Thorbjørn Jagland used the tie-break privilege of his position and voted to shelve the motion.

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Comment
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17. (C) The opposition parties jammed the government hard. There is no way that the government could have united its MPs to vote in favor of the anti-boycott motion. SV MPs would have defied their leadership if they were told to support the opposition motion; and, despite strong party discipline, many left-wing Labor party backbenchers could have broken ranks. The government faced only two options, both of which would have caused severe embarrassment and pain. It either could have voted against the opposition's anti-boycott motion, or laid bare its internal divisions in Parliament. Stoltenberg signaled clearly that he would have chosen the first option, and the government would have voted against a proposal that states a boycott of Israel is not Norwegian policy. Jagland's action to shelve the motion may have saved the government from embarrassment today, but the opposition is furious and will continue to make trouble for Stoltenberg and Co.

18. (C) While the circumstances that brought the opposition together -- the whole Halvorsen/boycott saga -- is highly regrettable, it proves that the gap between the Progress party and the other parties of the center-right is bridgeable. This is good. Progress is the largest opposition party, and it is inconceivable that a center-right government could be formed in the future without Progress. The parties that made up the previous Bondevik government just do not have enough support to govern again on their own. Progress is also the U.S.'s best friend in Norway, and our efforts over several years to cultivate close contacts have paid off. Progress appreciates that we have taken them seriously (when no one else did), and they have proven to be solid friends. The drawing together of the Norwegian center-right opposition parties should be seen a good thing, over the long run, for the advancement of U.S. interests in Norway.

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Opposition motion
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19. (U) Begin unofficial Embassy translation of the opposition motion:

proposal:

I. The Parliament asks the Government to recognize that a boycott of Israel would affect Israel and the Palestinians economically, destroy Norway's close relationship with Israel, affect international peace initiatives based on international law and the Roadmap for Peace, and stand in the way of future Norwegian contributions to peace.

II. The Parliament asks the Government to recognize that Norwegian policy towards Israel must be built on close cooperation, dialogue, and the will to contribute politically to a peace solution with the Palestinians based on international law and the Roadmap for Peace. A boycott is not, and should not be, Norwegian policy towards Israel.

End unofficial Embassy translation

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